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The Insider

Who Never Was

THE WAR THAT NEVER WAS,
by Bradley Earl Ayers. Bobbs-Merrill, 235 Pages. \$8.95.

By **HUMBERTO CRUZ**
Staff Writer

Bradley Earl Ayers is convinced that, somewhere, there is a connection between the CIA's secret war against Fidel Castro's Cuba in the early 1960s and the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert.

His book, "The War that Never Was," does not quite live up to its promise of being "an insider's account of CIA covert operations against Cuba." But it is one of the most interesting books published on this much-written-about subject.

If the book doesn't quite live up to its promise, it is because Ayers was no insider at all. Rather, Capt. Ayers, a regular Army officer, was plucked from an assignment in the Florida swamps to train Cuban exiles in commando missions against Cuba.

Ayers did more than train the commandos — he went on two of their expeditions, although he never did land with the men.

From the beginning, Ayers was emotionally involved in his venture; it is as a participant that he tells us his story. This personal involvement rather than the revelations gives the book its unique flavor.

Not that there aren't revelations, particularly Robert Kennedy's personal backing of many of the CIA efforts against Castro.

"On the one hand," writes Ayers, "the attorney general (Kennedy) showed personal interest in what we are doing, but on the other hand, orders for equipment often were delayed because the clerks in the supply branch took two-hour lunch breaks.

"I could not understand how, if the administration was really serious about getting rid of Castro, such inefficiency could be tolerated."

One of the most obvious examples of CIA inefficiency — its inability to communicate with the Cuban exiles — also diminishes the book's value. Language and culture are difficult barriers to break down. Ayers tries honestly and hard, but falls short of offering a comprehensive insight of what went on in the commandos' minds during both training and expeditions.

Because of the "emotional" slant of Ayers' narrative, this is a serious shortcoming.

But the book provides another kind of insight — that of a marriage disintegrating under the pressures of CIA work, a secret identity and emotional commitment to another cause. Ayers'

account of his marital problems, his affairs, are just as illuminating as his story about the CIA.

"Your work is nothing more than a series of lies," his wife Nancy tells him in front of other CIA people once. "Everyone I've met down here is so personally mixed up they don't live a normal life.

"You're phonies. The company (the CIA) warps and perverts and changes everybody who comes in contact with it. Just look at yourself. You don't even know who you are anymore."

To the outside world, Ayers is Daniel B. Williams, commercial pilot. Not even his Cuban mistress knows his real name.

Slowly, as Ayers sees less and less of his wife, he feels he belongs in only one place — the commando base at Elliot Key. "I had made my choice — to remain with the Cubans. My family was gone."

But Ayers' new life just about ended with the assassination of John Kennedy Nov. 22, 1963. "Suspend all activity," the CIA ordered him. "Keep men on island. Come ashore without delay."

The cancellation of a planned refinery raid against Cuba and the closure of the Elliott Key base marked the beginning of CIA anti-Castro operations in Miami. It also marked the beginning of the end of Ayers' fictional life. Two and a half years later Ayers returned to Miami to look for his lover only to be told that an account of his death had appeared in the newspapers — an account of the death of Daniel B. Williams.

The CIA has an answer for everything, Ayers concludes.